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INFO RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 7325
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1378
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 6751
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 2885
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 1304
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L ISLAMABAD 003111

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SUBJECT: SUICIDE BOMBER TARGETS ISLAMABAD CHIEF JUSTICE
RALLY

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: It is still too early to draw conclusions about the cause of the July 18 suicide bombing in Islamabad. The government's challenge will be to provide the increased security that opposition parties and the general public are demanding without imposing a state of emergency. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) A suicide bombing disrupted a rally in the F-8 neighborhood of Islamabad on the evening of July 18. Police sources reported that the bomber, who was unable to pass through the security check at the rally, detonated himself approximately 60 meters away from the rally, killing 19 people (11 of whom were police) and injuring 63.

¶3. (SBU) Suspended Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry was scheduled to address a crowd of Pakistan Bar Association members, Pakistan People's Party and Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz supporters. Although the media reported that most of those killed were Pakistan People's Party workers, a People's Party official told PolOff that five party members were killed and eight were wounded. The attack occurred before Chaudhry's arrival.

¶4. (U) President Musharraf immediately issued a statement condemning the act, expressing condolences to the families of those killed, appealing to the public to remain calm, vigilant, and requesting the public assist authorities in tracking down those responsible for the act. Interior Minister Aftab Sherpao told reporters that the attack was the continuation of a series of terrorist attacks that have occurred in the wake of the Red Mosque operation and said that there was no possibility that the government would impose a state of emergency. The government has tightened security throughout Pakistan in response to the incident.

¶5. (U) In a particularly inflammatory statement, Aitzaz Ahsan, Chief Justice Chaudhry's lead counsel, blamed the attack on the government and said that the attack was a government attempt to "eliminate" the Chief Justice. The Pakistan People's Party Parliamentary Board, which was meeting with Chairperson Benazir Bhutto in London, issued a statement expressing apprehension that a "hidden hand" was creating anarchy in order impose a state of emergency and postpone elections.

¶6. (C) Speculation about the cause of the attack is already rife. Like the People's Party, some Pakistanis have been quick to blame the government for planning the attack so that

President Musharraf can use the current spate of violence as an excuse to declare a state of emergency and postpone upcoming parliamentary elections (which will occur later this year or early next year). Others have attributed the blast as an act of revenge against the Pakistan People's Party for their support of the government's actions in the Lal Masjid operation. Still others -- particularly ethnic Pashtuns -- see the attack as a logical -- and uncontrollable -- extension of the violence already occurring in the Northwest Frontier Province and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas.

17. (C) Comment: It is still too early to draw firm conclusions about the cause of the July 18 suicide bombing in Islamabad, but the tactics (and other information) indicate it is most likely related to militant groups in the Pak-Afghan border area. Like the infiltration of radicals into the Red Mosque, this is another troubling sign that the violence in the border area can spread. The government's challenge will be to provide the increased security that opposition parties and the general public are demanding. End Comment.

PATTERSON